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ABSTRACT

This document considers the language arts instructional materials in use in the primary schools of Trinidad and Tobago and questions how effectively these materials cater to the development of competence in the English language by children whose vernacular language differs structurally in a fundamental way from Internationally Acceptable English. Problems with specific books are discussed as examples of more general problems. Most of the books used have not been written with the particular situation in mind, and they are unsuited to the purpose, lacking linguistic and cultural relevance for the Trinidadian child. Illustrations, structures, linguistic features, vocabulary, and cultural elements are discussed and improvements are suggested. (VM)

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PROJECT 15

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON

LANGUAGE ARTS TEXTBOOKS

IN USE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

These preliminary comments on language arts textbooks constitute the second publication of findings from the Institute of Education's project on problems in learning and teaching English in the primary schools of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our study of textbooks in use is intended to ascertain how effectively these materials cater to the development of competence in the English Language by children whose vernacular language differs structurally in a fundamental way from Internationally Acceptable English. Of necessity the broad contexts in which the language is presented to the learner have to be examined. For this reason, we have considerable interest in the cultural relevance of the materials.

An additional reason for this interest is our concern with the dysfunctionality of education in this region. The cultural irrelevance of the textbooks in use as outlined in this publication is in our view an important contributor to this dysfunctionality. Obviously there are other inputs into the consciousness of children which educate them away from their environment, and discarding currently used textbooks cannot by itself solve the difficulties. However, this too must be part of the movement for change.

Our final publication on textbooks later this year will provide much more specific details on individual texts and a set of heads under which new texts can be evaluated. During the frighteningly long period between now and the eventual provision on a wide scale of textbooks tailored to our needs, we hope that our work will allow teachers and education boards to eliminate all but the least harmful materials.

STRUCTURES, LINGUISTIC FEATURES, LINGUISTIC RELEVANCE

In Trinidad and Tobago, exposure to the structure of English through written materials has been of special significance, for this has been the chief means by which the language has been learnt. Opportunities for speaking Internationally Acceptable English (I.A.E.) have always been few and the barriers to successful English language learning have been formidable.[1] In fact, one must accept as true the statement that a high percentage of our language learners hear and attempt to speak I.A.E. in the classroom only, and even then not during every class.

One would expect that the linguistic structures presented in the Language Arts textbooks used in the schools would be appropriately graded and selected for the particular group of children and would be unquestionable in their acceptability. For a variety of reasons this is not the case. Firstly, there is a difference in linguistic background between the British children for whom the texts, with few exceptions, were intended and the children of Trinidad and Tobago, on whom they are being foisted. The

[1] See Cuffie, D.G.: "Problems in the Teaching of English in the Island of Trinidad from 1797 to the Present Day. M.A. Thesis: University of London, 1963.

former use the texts to assist them in the mastery of their mother tongue; the latter use them to learn a language that is, in many respects, foreign to them. No textbook can serve two such dissimilar purposes. Thus, in our study, while some attention is paid to features which are undesirable from any standpoint, our main concern is with the suitability of these textbooks for our special needs.

We feel that the target should be I.A.E. and not necessarily the language of any particular country in terms of colloquialisms, speech rhythms or accent. Hence, one of the basic requirements for a textbook to be considered suitable for our pupils is minimal occurrence of colloquialisms and idioms which are unfamiliar to Caribbean speakers of English. Hence a textbook, particularly an Infant Reader, which abounds in expressions such as:

(a) "Now see my one"[2] or

(b) "I can wash a dog"[3]

is for our purposes unsuitable. An acceptable text in this regard is one which presents basic structures that

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[2]Schonell and Serjeant: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk. II), Oliver and Boyd 1958.

[3]Ibid

the child can use as productive models, i.e. which he can use as patterns for new, independent utterances.

A second requirement is that the book should avoid questionable or marginally acceptable grammar, style or punctuation, especially where these may conflict with patterns which the pupils are trying to grasp. Hence the following sentences must be rejected:-

"Here is Nip, the dog and the three kittens"[4]

"There is a cup and a saucer".[5]

"But there he was out in the cold he had no home to go to".[6]

"You must wash and get ready then you will help me".[7]

Writers of textbooks for small children think it desirable to communicate with them in an artificial, supposedly child-like language. (c.f. sentences such as "I was run, run, running"; "Let us go jump, jump, jumping)[8] In addition, the use of "and" as a connective is overdone, a practice which may reinforce undesirable habits in speech and writing. Abuse of "and", "then", "and then" is already a problem in this country. For similar reasons redundancy should be avoided: "He will fill them full of good

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[4] Ibid

[5] Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers, (Introductory Book), Thomas Nelson and Sons (not dated)

[6] McKee, Harrison, McCowen and Lehr: The McKee Readers (Bk. iv) Nelson.

[7] Kirston and Richardson: Our First Readers (Reader Two) Nelson '69

[8] Schonell and Serjeant: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk. II) Oliver and Boyd, 1958.

rich soil"; "They laughed till they had to hold their sides with laughing".[9]

As is to be expected, in the sample textbooks there is no evidence of regulation of structure presentation in accordance with the linguistic experience of our pupils. Undue simplicity, overcomplexity and inconsistency of patterns are all too frequent. Most writers of texts for children 5-7 years old assume that such children can cope only with the simple sentence when, in fact, these children have been using complex sentence patterns for quite some time. Thus the presence of the latter type of sentence in reading books should assist, not impede, linguistic development. In fact, the absence of these structures may contribute to artificiality in the text.

On the other hand, children at a given age level may find themselves faced with structures which, in terms of length of components and degree of complexity, are far beyond their linguistic competence. An even greater fault is using complex structures in a narrative and then reverting to simple sentences in a subsequent lesson, thereby removing all question as to whether the approach to structure is gradual or haphazard.

But perhaps the best way to illustrate the need for taking the linguistic background of the Trinidadian child into consideration when selecting material is to look at the ways in which a structure which presents no difficulty for children of one background can pose a

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[9]Schonell: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk iv), Oliver and Boyd, 1959

problem for those of another. "See Janet, mother"[10] seems straightforward from the point of view of both structure and comprehensibility. But when one considers the fact that in our creole dialect, where the noun is not inflected to indicate possession, "Janet's mother"is rendered as *Janet mother*, one can immediately see, not only that this type of sentence can be misread and misunderstood, the presence of the comma notwithstanding, but also that a pattern in the dialect is being further reinforced. Similarly the sentence "The five chicks ran to find little white chick" followed by "Five chicks run to find little white chick"[11] may suggest that "run" and "ran" are interchangeable, especially because in the dialect, the past tense of *run* is *run*.

The grammar books in use do not address themselves to the problems peculiar to our children. Indeed, what is often assumed by writers is a degree of linguistic competence which our children do not necessarily have. This comment applies even to the few writers who have written texts for our children exclusively. As long as text books continue to assume the erroneous premise, that the speech of our children is comprised of ungrammatical renditions of Standard English, such texts cannot attack the deep-rooted linguistic problems that are now known to exist. In fact, one finds in use, texts that deal with problems presumably peculiar to British children, such as having to

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[10] O'Donnell, Munro and Warwick: Janet and John (Bk. I) James Nisbet & Co. Ltd. (not dated)

[11] Schonell and Serjeant: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk. II) Oliver and Boyd, 1958

discriminate between 'did' and 'done'. In short it is only in instances where our linguistic problems and those of British children coincide that the majority of the text books seem to have any linguistic relevance at all.

Finally, there is need for precision in writing both as a requirement of comprehension and as an acknowledgement of the fact that small children tend to take the printed word literally. A sentence such as "I can skip after you"[12] is merely ambiguous but one is left to wonder what meaning is conveyed to a child when he reads something like "People put wire netting around their chickens to keep me away"[13]

THE TEACHING MATERIAL

Once again the difficulties here arise mainly from the fact that most of the books used have not been written with our situation in mind and consequently are unsuited to the purpose; ironically, the few that have been written by Trinidadians are based on the very models that are considered unsuitable. Unaware of the linguistic background of our children, the writers cannot provide a satisfactory course in English language for them; instead they fall into the trap of assuming a higher degree of linguistic competence in English on the part of the pupil than he actually has. In this sense the textbooks in use are never linguistically relevant to any great extent.

Proof of these remarks lies in the fact that regardless of the quality or quantity of grammar books in use, topics such as agreement of subject and verb, tense and selection of pronominal forms, among

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[12] O'Donnell, Munro and Warwick; op. cit.
[13] Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers, (Introductory Book), Nelson and Sons.

many other areas, continue to be problems, notwithstanding the fact that they have been tackled by a battery of primary and secondary school teachers in turn. In addition, the language of newspaper reporting and scripts written for Public Service and Teachers' examinations reveal that even holders of G.C.E. certificates in English can still go further in the quest for competence in English. Clearly, the time has come for acknowledging the effect of powerful forces which have militated against English Language learning and continue to do so. Methods and materials that have resulted only in minimal success must be reviewed.

In the mean time, children continue to confound their teachers by making perfect scores when given exercises restricted to certain grammatical features, while showing limited evidence of mastery of these same areas in their own speech and writing; teachers continue their frantic search for the textbook that would solve the problems; and the view, once farfetched, that we cannot master the English Language gains a little more currency.

Linguistic relevance apart, there are other important observations that need to be made about the material in the textbooks. If, for instance, the question is how much will the pupils have learnt upon completion of a given text, then some texts are woefully short of material. A good example of this is Essentials of English (Book B),[14] where very little teaching material is provided. Texts with such a deficiency will obviously have to be supplemented at additional cost to the student.

[14]The Essentials of English ('B'): Holmes, McDougall Ltd. 1956

The practice among writers seems to be to return to topics, treating them each time in a little more detail. The only quarrel with this is that often, serious gaps are left in the child's knowledge. For example, even if we use traditional grammar as a yard stick, we find that by the end of Book 4, the definition of a noun in the Haydn Richards series[15] does not yet include names of places; by the third book of the Visual English series[16] adverbs still modify verbs only; by the fourth book in the Fundamental English series,[17] only three parts of speech have been treated.

At the other extreme are those texts which try to cover too much ground or proceed too quickly for the average pupil. In Forty lessons and exercises in grammar and language;[18] all eight parts of speech are covered in one lesson - it is not a revision lesson - and there are exercises based on this material. In English for Upper Primary Classes,[19] nine tenses are introduced on the same page, and three short lessons cover nine types of adverbial clauses!

[15] Haydn Richards: Haydn Richards Junior English: Ginn & Co. 1965
[16] Davies and Trevaskis: Visual English Junior Series: Evans Brothers Ltd. 1957
[17] Ballard: Fundamental English, University of London Press (not dated)
[18] Houseman: Forty Lessons and Exercises in Grammar and Language, Hulton Educational Publications, 1960
[19] Wong: English for Upper Primary Classes: Collins 1963

Again, at one extreme can be found textbooks in which the material is simplified to the point of being misleading; at the other we find explanations, definitions and statements that are useless either because of their length or degree of complexity. It is quite unnecessary, for example, to tell children who have been using "his" correctly that "if the possessor is masculine gender, the possessive adjective is masculine" (Brighter Grammar Book II[20]) or to go to great lengths to explain the meaning and function of tenses as is done in Book 3,[21] when the 'explanations' are such that small children will fail to understand them in any case.

Writers of textbooks ought to ensure that their material is properly organized. In Brighter Grammar I,[22] pronouns are included as possible subjects of sentences although no previous mention has been made of this part of speech. The writers are then forced to define pronouns in a footnote. In English for Lower Primary Classes[23] just as the students are invited to "compose sentences about familiar things", the writer realises that he has not yet said what a sentence is and consequently now has to define a sentence, placing his definition - "a group of words that makes sense" - in parenthesis. Nine successive lessons on Tense (Brighter Grammar, Book 3)[24] and the inclusion of

[20] Eckersley and Macaulay: Brighter Grammar Book II, Longmans 1953
[21] Eckersley and Macaulay: Brighter Grammar, Book III, Longmans 1953
[22] Eckersley and Macaulay: Brighter Grammar, Book I, Longmans 1953
[23] Wong: English for Lower Primary Classes, Collins 1963
[24] Eckersley and Macaulay: Brighter Grammar Book III, Longmans 1953

Emphatic and Reflexive pronouns in the same lesson[25] must also be judged as poorly organised material.

Too often we find material which does not merely confuse or mislead the reader but which is totally inaccurate and even absurd. The definition of a sentence as "a group of words that makes complete sense" followed by the definition of a clause as "a sentence that does not make complete sense by itself" is puzzling. Failure to stress that it is usage of a word that determines the part of speech to which it is assigned can cause serious problems. In English for Lower Primary Classes,[26] the writer recognises this but not before he falls victim of the same mistake in calling "talk", "laugh" and "jump" verbs. In Forty lessons and exercises in Grammar and Language[27] Houseman states that in the sentence, "My cousin came to stay", "stay" is the object of the verb "came" and so does the work of an adverb. He also claims that "a conjunction can be almost any part of speech".

For our children at least, the grammatical function of words in some poems is not necessarily easy to grasp; thus using such a poem to introduce the adjective, (Modern English, Introductory Book)[28] may not be a good idea. In the lesson on case in English for Middle Primary Classes,[29] the writer fails to mention the peculiarities of the

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[25] Ibid
[26] Wong: English for Lower Primary Classes, Collins 1963
[27] Houseman: Forty Lessons and Exercises in Grammar and Language, Hulton Educational Publications 1960
[28] Russell: Modern English, (Introductory Book), Robert Gibson and Sons 1959
[29] Wong: English for Middle Primary Classes, Collins 1963.

verb 'to be'. Yet in the accompanying exercise, the very first sentence, "Cricket is a game for gentlemen" forces him to state in parenthesis that "game" is nominative, "since it relates to cricket which is nominative". It is doubtful whether any child can really understand this line of reasoning.

One ought not to say, as is done in English for Middle Primary Classes[30] that pronouns ending in 'self' are reflexive since they may also be emphatic. The statement, "always write 'an' before words beginning with vowels"[31] must be challenged since it is the initial sound of the word that determines whether 'a' or 'an' is used. If the writer's rule is followed, one will be forced to say *an uniform, *an union, *an unique occasion.

A great deal of information, sometimes appearing under the banner of general knowledge is either inaccurate, culture bound or worthless. Our children are no better off, for instance, for knowing that the feminine forms of "eel", "salmon" and "coster" are "elver", "parr" and "donah"[32] respectively, or that a collection of snipe is called a wisp. Nor does it matter whether "Hebdomadal" and "Pandiculation" are large words for the small words "weekly" and "yawning"[33] respectively. Inaccurate statements such as "the home of a savage is

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[30] Ibid
[31] Haydn Richards: Haydn Richards Junior English (Bk. I) Ginn & Co. 1965
[32] Maciver: First Aid in English, Robert Gibson and Sons (Not dated)
[33] Best: The Students' Companion, Collins 1958

called an adobe"[34] or that "of a city worker" is called a "tenement"[35] must be rejected.

Composition

In the textbooks examined, approaches to composition leave much to be desired. Frequently the topics are accompanied by word lists, which,although intended primarily as a means of aiding the pupils, bring their own problems. For one thing, the words given are often outside of the children's vocabulary. For another, they tend to colour the children's perspective, depriving it of some of the freshness and originality that it ought to contain. There must be something ridiculous in including a word list for a composition on "Myself".[36] Worst of all, what should be an exercise in creativity turns out to be a type of game which has as its chief objective the use of as many of the 'approved' words as possible with the aim of pleasing the teacher.

Some authors present a model on which the child's work is to be patterned. One writer writes a paragraph on "The Cat" for example, and instructs the students to "write a piece like this about a dog, with just the same sort of sentence and the same number of sentences".[37] This we consider to be utter rubbish. The level of writing in the writer's model is too high and the writing too controlled for children to emulate. In any event such an exercise is

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[34]Maciver: First Aid in English, Robert Gibson and Sons (Not dated)
[35]Ibid
[36]Ballard: Fundamental English (Book III), University of London Press (N.D.)
[37]Ibid

detrimental to the development of the creative abilities of the young child.

Practice and Testing

Most of the books examined, provide ample opportunity to practise the material taught. This is commendable. But there are however, certain types of exercises which require comment. Writers use simple and straightforward examples to illustrate their material and then in the exercises confront pupils with those that are fairly complex variations of the rules or principles learnt. Indeed, some writers include material that they have not dealt with at all. At the other extreme lies the following situation - The identical sentences, phrases, words which make up the teaching material are repeated in the practice exercises, thereby providing no challenge to the student.[38]

Then there are those types of exercises that are not deserving of constant repetition since they are not of particular value to the pupil. In the Chambers' English Manual (Book I,)[39] children are asked to copy either words or sentences from the text. There are one hundred and eight (108) such copying exercises. In the Fundamental English (Book I),[40] there are ten (10) exercises in which pupils are asked to arrange jumbled words in proper order.

Cultural Relevance

This study will not be breaking new ground if its findings are that a large number of language arts texts used in the schools contain material that is culturally irrelevant. Everybody seems to know this.

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[38]Maciver: First Aid in English, Robert Gibson and Sons (not dated)
[39]Chambers: English Manuals (Bk. I) W and R Chambers Ltd. (not dated)
[40]Ballard: Fundamental English (I) University of London Press (not dated)

What needs to be guaged, however, is whether this irrelevance is merely superficial or whether it pervades the material to the extent of rendering certain books useless and whether the use of such material in our teaching programmes militates against the achievement of our goals.

The most obvious form of irrelevance is the reference to flora and fauna found outside of the Caribbean. We object, for instance, to our children being required to give the colour of hollyberries, chestnuts or heather.[41] Few of our children have ever heard of a cox's pippin,[42] a sorbo ball[43] or a hod.[44] Examples of this kind of irrelevance are too numerous to mention here. Equally obvious is the irrelevance of articles and manufactured goods, usage of which is confined to particular countries; or activities such as ice-skating and the ritual known as "having tea" which are hardly known in this country. In short, the experiences described in a textbook comprised of "a wide range of English activities",[45] as one writer puts it, are bound to prove to be largely irrelevant to the experiences of our children.

A more serious fault, however, is that very often totally foreign concepts pervade the material to the extent that the very essence of a lesson is lost on our children. In one case, the purpose of one lesson is defeated unless the reader is familiar with the

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[41] Ballard: Fundamental English (II) University of London Press (not dated)
[42] Ballard: Fundamental English (III) University of London Press (not dated)
[43] Ballard: Fundamental English (iv) University of London Press (not dated)
[44] Ibid
[45] Davies and Trevaskis: Visual English Junior Series, Evans Brothers Ltd. 1957

characteristics of a Jack in the Box.[46] But the major offenders in this regard are the lessons in which correct interpretation hinges on familiarity with the characteristics of the four seasons.

If this were the whole nature of cultural relevance, then, it may be argued, the situation could be looked upon as tolerable or could be considered as one in which some adaptation would solve the problems. But no such adaptation will suffice. For the problem lies in the totality of the experience; and this embraces not only the aspects already mentioned, but also the appearance, attitude and behaviour of the characters, their way of life, their interrelationships, their ideals and aspirations. No mere adaptation of the text by *going local* in terms of flora and fauna can remedy this. Nor can we ignore the fact that often the values projected in the textbook belong to a middle class with upper class aspirations. The writer who includes the question "Do you sleep in a bed?"[47] in a text book is fully confident of an affirmative reply and this alone shows the assumptions which are operating in his mind. The fact that such a question, and other seemingly innocuous ones, could trigger very embarrassing situations with possible traumatic consequences for children in certain parts of this country, aptly supports our view on the middle class orientation of the texts. And when one considers that even in the countries from whence these books came, the perpetuation of such values is recognised to be irrelevant and inimical to the interests of the community, it is curious that we should embrace what

[46] McKee, Harrison, Mc Cowen, Lehr: The McKee Readers (Bk. 3) Nelson (n.d.)
[47] Schonell and Serjeant: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk. II) Oliver & Boyd '58

has neither roots nor relevance in our environment.

There is strong support for the view that the effects of exposure to material that is irrelevant in these ways cannot be fully guaged. What is certain is that by using books primarily intended for children of another culture, our children are placed at more than one disadvantage. Schonell makes the valid point that "a child finds it easier to understand reading material which deals with activities he himself has experienced".[48] Our children, many of whom use texts written by Schonell, find themselves reading material which deals with activities that neither they nor anyone else around them have experienced. Learning to read under the present system is thus a more difficult exercise than it ought to be.

To consider how a child reacts to material which deals with people, situations and activities with which he cannot identify is to get closer to the problem of cultural relevance. Failure to recognise connecting links between his world and that represented in the textbooks he uses must necessarily create an attitude of alienation where involvement is the desired aim. Small wonder that at secondary and even at university level, Trinidadians and Tobagonians often find it impossible to relate the emotional experiences of characters in novels and plays to their own; that derisive laughter and unsympathetic comments at the most tragic or pathetic moments in a film are a well-known phenomenon; that to local teachers, the teaching of English Literature, especially poetry, is such an irksome, unrewarding task. Recently there has been comment on the effects of cultural

[48]Schonell F.J.: The Psychology and Teaching of Reading: Oliver & Boyd 1945

deprivation of West Indians being educated in England. Cultural deprivation of West Indians being educated in the West Indies is an area worthy of serious research.

This must not be taken to mean that all material that is outside of local culture must be excluded from texts to be used locally. Lessons of the informational type have their place as long as the information is of some value or interest to the reader. What has to be constantly asked by the teacher is; whose interests is a particular lesson intended to serve? And even though many worthwhile lessons can be found in which the child's curiosity about the world around him is aroused and satisfied, the argument that the child should first become acquainted with his own environment still holds good.

Irrelevant material triggers a poor emotional response and, as a consequence, a lack of interest and involvement. The child who, in addition to this, has to contend with complex linguistic structures and vocabulary with which he is unfamiliar can hardly be blamed if he considers education inimical to his best interests.

Incidentally, the attitude of a few writers towards negroes in the texts would be amusing if the implications of their statements could always be overlooked. It is one thing to say that the child of a negro is called a piccaninny,[49] or to label a drawing of a negro, "Mr. Black".[50] It is another, however, to present an outline of a composition in which a girl attempts to get rid of freckles by applying a

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[49]Haydn Richards: Junior English Revised, Ginn & Co. 1960
[50]Davies and Trevaskis, Visual English Junior Series, Evans Brothers Ltd.'57

tin of brown cream for removing stains, and to include, in the accompanying word list, the phrase "like a nigger"[51] or to suggest that "the following words can be used to tell about a coalman - lousy, grimy, coaldust, white streaks, red mouth, nigger".[52]

Illustrations

Illustrations in a text book may serve several roles. They may, for example, be the chief means of communicating ideas to young children to whom printed words as yet convey little or no meaning; they may be the focal point for discussion, a means of stimulating interest; or they may be used for picture comprehension exercises and for testing intelligence and powers of observation.

Some publishers of infant readers realise that illustrations are an absolute necessity and that colour contributes immensely to visual appeal. But the drabness of ink sketches and of dull colours is a feature of several books. At the other extreme, in at least one text, a bright orange intended as a background colour, defeats its purpose by drawing too much attention to itself.[53]

Occasionally, poorly drawn illustrations result in confusion and in a lack of realism rather than clarity. In such cases one is hard put even to understand the activities shown, to identify objects or to come to conclusions about their size. The end result may be that facts are misrepresented and unnecessary speculation and conjecture are encouraged where precision is required. In one text[54] in which

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[51] The Essentials of English (Bk. II) Holmes McDougall Ltd. 1957
[52] Ibid
[53] Newman and Sherlock: The Caribbean Readers, (Introductory Bk. I) Ginn and Co. Ltd. 1937
[54] McKee, Harrison, McCowen and Lehr: The McKee Readers (Bk. I) Nelson (n.d.)

two illustrations are on each page, the importance of some of the activities in a particular illustration is minimized, simply because the second illustration is too small.

There is also a need for revision of the illustrations in books published many years ago since advances in science and technology now render questionable, captions on illustrations of objects which have become outmoded or obsolete. In the Nelson's West Indian Readers[55] for example, the motorcars illustrated bear little resemblance to present-day models, while a "van" is shown as a horse-drawn vehicle. The lesson on the Union Jack needs to be replaced by one on the National flag.

But there is a more serious charge to be laid against the illustrations in some of the books examined. If our assertion is accepted that the tone of such books suggests the practices, values, ideals and aspirations of the middle or upper class (see Cultural Relevance), then the illustrations, by pictorial representation of the subject matter, must be seen as an even greater contributor to the kind of cultural disorientation which it is feared our children risk through use of such texts. The characters illustrated nearly always bear no resemblance to the majority of children who use the texts in Trinidad and Tobago. Always impeccably dressed, these characters operate against a background of luxurious and well furnished homes and well tended gardens and engage in rituals and activities not normally

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[55]Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers, Nelson (not dated)

associated with the majority of the people. Such illustrations can only foster, especially in children bred in poverty and discomfort, a sense of alienation in so far as they remove all opportunity for identification with the characters and situations described and perpetuate the impression that education is something that is irrelevant to their own personal lives.

Vocabulary

Problems of vocabulary are closely linked with those of cultural and linguistic relevance. Once again our children are at a disadvantage in having to use text books primarily intended for children of another country. Educators agree that if the written word is to stimulate the interest of the reader, it must embody emotional and cultural experiences which are familiar to him. What one finds in our situation is that the words used as a means of triggering responses are unsuitable since they refer to realities which are meaningless to the child. A word such as "Nasturtium"[56] for example, has neither emotional nor cultural appeal for our children. The problem for writers lies in knowing what words are within the experience of these children, a problem which is compounded by the fact that even in as small a country as Trinidad and Tobago, urban and rural children may have widely differing experiences.

Writers of texts also have to consider the problems inherent in the introduction of words. For if anything can frustrate a young

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[56]Schonell: The Happy Venture Readers (Bk. iv), Oliver and Boyd, 1959

reader, it must be having to face a battery of new words rapidly and haphazardly introduced into the material. Needless to say, the development of reading competence is seriously retarded, for since the reader is engaged primarily - and often solely - in wrestling with words which often represent things with which he is unfamiliar, he cannot be expected to understand what he reads. Happily, in some infant readers, great care has been taken not only to introduce a small number of words at a time, but also to use these words as often as possible so that they ultimately find a place in the child's vocabulary.

However, efforts to repeat words as often as possible should not result in meaningless, nonsensical or forced sentences. Whatever the pedagogical value of sentences such as "The skin of a fig fell on his chin"[57] "Seek for the peel all the week"[58] "The bad dog had a lash"[59] they are clearly lacking in literary merit. Even in word-building exercises, inclusion of words such as "nay"[60] and "coon"[61] which are either archaic or of no value to the student should be avoided. Writers should also guard against the coining of expressions such as "the telephone man"[62] the "zoo animals"[63] as these are undesirable models which the pupils may be penalized for using in their own written work.

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[57] Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers, (Second Primer), Thomas Nelson & Sons (not dated)
[58] Ibid
[59] Ibid
[60] Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers (Introductory Book) Nelson (n.d.)
[61] Ibid
[62] McKee, Harrison, McCowen and Lehr: The McKee Readers (Bk. 5) Nelson (n.d.)
[63] Ibid

Achievement of aims

(a) Readers

Aims are not normally stated in the readers. The underlying aim seems to be to provide material which either through (i) the Look and Say approach; (ii) the Phonic method or (iii) a combination of both, will assist in the development of reading skills. This study will not now go into the efficacy of one method over another. Nor does it concern itself unduly, at this point, with whether the readers can in fact achieve their aim, simply because it is possible to argue that a child can be taught to read the material that is in any book. It concerns itself, however, with the possible cost at which the aim is achieved. The questions to be asked are:-

(1) Does the use of a particular text cause reading to be seen in the eyes of a child as a challenging and rewarding exercise or as a painful and irksome one?

(2) What effects do the weaknesses in the text, as outlined in earlier sections of this report, have on the pupils?

One ought to begin by making an important distinction between the learner, that is, the child who is learning to read, and the reader, one who has mastered the basic skills and needs practice mainly. The question of cultural relevance rests squarely on this division. The learner needs to be strongly motivated and the point has already been made that a great deal of the motivation lies in the relevance of the situations to his own world. Hence the textbooks have been examined with this in view. The child who has learnt to read.

however, does not necessarily require this type of motivation. In fact, he should now be allowed to satisfy his curiosity in as many directions as it extends: adventure stories, science fiction, informational type of material. It must be noted here that there is a marked absence in the texts of one of the primary sources of motivation - sportsmen and sporting events.

Thus, this report has been more critical of textbooks for infants. It has looked into illustrations, structures, linguistic features, vocabulary and of course cultural relevance, because it considers these to be the areas where major weaknesses can seriously affect the pupils quite apart from reducing the pleasurable aspects of reading.

The system of controlling and grading carefully the material in infant readers such as the Happy Venture and Janet and John series has already been referred to. Once out of the Infant department, however, the learner, depending on the type of text he encounters, may find reading to be a horse of an entirely different colour. If the books to be used then are the Nelson's West Indian Readers[64] or the Caribbean Readers[65] or the Trinidad and Tobago Readers[66] he may find -

(i) that lessons are not, as a rule, based on animals or interesting fictitious characters - an important feature

[64] Cutteridge: Nelson's West Indian Readers, Nelson (n.d.)
[65] Newman and Sherlock: The Caribbean Readers, Ginn & Co. Ltd. 1937
[66] The Trinidad and Tobago Readers, Collins, 1969

of the Infant texts;

(ii) that lessons may be more informative but less interesting;

(iii) that new words are introduced somewhat haphazardly and at an extremely rapid rate;

(iv) that he now has to grapple with these words and at the same time extract meaning from what he reads.

In short, the gap between the Infant department and the Junior school, with regard to reading, is a difficult one to bridge. It is not surprising that children who read the texts for infants reasonably well turn out to be poor readers later on.

(b) Grammar books

Although stated in a variety of ways, the underlying aim of these books is the development of linguistic competence in the child. One text speaks of "encouraging pupils to express themselves freely and clearly";[67] another provides "adequate practice in the mechanics of writing English";[68] there is even one whose aim is "mastery of the English Grammar".[69]

But the question as to whether this aim can be achieved to any great extent by such textbooks has already been raised, in view of our peculiar linguistic situation. The fact that some children leave the primary school with a reasonable degree of competence in English proves nothing. There is enough evidence to show that even at G.C.E.

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[67] Russell: Modern English, (Introductory Book), Robert Gibson and Sons 1959

[68] The Essentials of English: Holmes McDougall Ltd. 1956

[69] Houseman: Forty lessons and Exercises in Grammar and Language Hulton Educational Publications 1960

and post G.C.E. levels, linguistic problems first observed in the primary school have not yet been ironed out. The need for an entirely different approach to language teaching, including the preparation of material has already been argued in Away Robin Run - A Critical Description of the Teaching of the Language Arts in the Primary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago.[70]

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[70]Carrington, Borely & Knight: Away Robin Run! - A Critical Description of the Teaching of the Language Arts in the Primary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago, Institute of Education U.W.I., 1972.

April 14, 1972

APPENDIX 1

Language Arts Textbooks in use in Sample Schools.

Books commented on are indicated by *.

Class: 1st Year Infants

TITLE	AUTHOR OR EDITOR
Blue Water Readers	Gilroy
*Caribbean Readers	Newman and Sherlock
English Workbook for the Caribbean	Ridout
*Happy Venture Readers	Schonell & Sergeant
*Janet and John Readers	Munro & O'Donnell
John and Betty Readers	—
*Mc Kee Readers	Mc Kee, Harrison, Mc Cowen & Lehr
My First Reader	Slickland
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Workbook for Happy Venture Readers	Schonell & Sergeant
Workbook for Janet and John series	Munro & O'Donnell

Class: 2nd Year Infants

*Caribbean Readers	Newman and Sherlock
English Workbook for the Caribbean	Ridout
First Workbook	Clark
*Happy Venture Readers	Schonell and Sergeant
*Janet and John Readers	Munro and O'Donnell
Joy in Reading	Runciman
Learning English	Craig
*McKee Readers	McKee, Harrison, McCowen & Lehr
Success in Spelling	Quance, Madden, Carlson
The Peg Family	—
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Word Perfect	Ridout
Word Picture Book	Munro Series

Class: First Standard

TITLE	AUTHOR OR EDITOR
*Caribbean Readers	Newman and Sherlock
*Chambers' English Manuals	Chambers
Easy Steps in English	—
*English for Lower Primary Classes	Wong
*English for Primary Schools	Wong
English for Primary Schools	Cleland
English Workbook for the Caribbean	Ridout
*Essentials of English	Holmes
First English Workbook	Ridout
*Fundamental English	Ballard
&Happy Venture Readers	Schonell
Introductory Workbook II	Ridout
*Janet and John Readers	Munro
*Junior English	Richards
*One Hundred Exercises in English Usage and Composition	Dalzell
Reading for Meaning	Carr
Round and About Us	—
Second Introductory English Workbook	Ridout
Sensible Spelling Book	—
Success in Spelling	Carlson, Quance & Madden
Trinidad and Tobago Readers	Collins
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Word Perfect	Ridout

Class: Second Standard

Better English for the Caribbean	Ridout & Sherlock
Blackie's Tropical Reader	—
*Brighter Grammar	Eckersley and Macaulay
Caribbean Readers	Sherlock and Newman
Easy Steps in English Spelling	—
Easy Words at Work	Mosby
*English for Lower Primary Classes	Wong
*English for Primary Schools	Wong
*English Manuals	Chambers'
English Usage and Composition	Dalzell
English Workbook for the Caribbean	Ridout
*Essentials of English	Holmes
Essential Spelling List	Schonell & Hopkins
*First Aid English	Maciver
First Workbook	Ridout
*Fundamental English	Ballard
*Happy Venture Readers	Schonell
*Junior English	Richards
*Modern English	Russell

TITLE	AUTHOR OR EDITOR
Second Standard Contd.	
Reading for Meaning	Carr
Success in Spelling	Quance, Carlson, Madden
Trinidad and Tobago Readers	Collins
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Word Perfect	Ridout
Third Standard	
A Noble Company	Campton
*Brighter Grammar	Eckersley and Macaulay
Caribbean Readers	Newman and Sherlock
Easy Steps in English Spelling	—
*English for Lower Primary Schools	Wong
*English for Middle Primary Schools	Wong
English for Primary Schools	Cleland
*English Manuals	Chambers
English Workbook	Ridout
Essential English	Holmes
*Essentials of English	Holmes
*Fundamental English	Ballard
*Junior English	Richards
Modern English	Russell
New First Aid in English	Maciver
*One Hundred Exercises in English Usage and Composition	Dalzell
Reading for Meaning	Carr
Success in Spelling	Quance, Carlson, Madden
Trinidad and Tobago Readers	Collins
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Words at Work	Maciver
Words at Work	Mosby
Word Perfect	Ridout
Fourth Standard	
*Brighter Grammar	Eckersley and Macaulay
Caribbean Essential Spelling List	Schonell and Hopkins
Caribbean Readers	Sherlock
Complete English Course	Gunton
Easy Steps in English	Wheaton
*English for Lower Primary Schools	Wong
*English for Middle Primary Schools	Wong
English for Primary Schools	Cleland
English Grammar for Beginners	Tipping
*English Manuals	Chambers

TITLE	AUTHOR OR EDITOR
Fourth Standard Contd.	
English Workbook 2	Ridout
Essentials of English	Watson
*Fundamental English	Ballard
General Progress Papers	Thomas
Holmes Comprehension and Grammar	Holmes
*Junior English Revised	Richards
Junior Vocabulary Exercises	Crew
More Words at Work	Mosby
New First Aid English	Maciver
Once a Week	Perry
*One Hundred Exercises in English Usage and Composition	Dalzell
Preparing for Primary School Reading for Meaning	Carr
Selection Examination English Tests	Richards
Short Course in English Grammar	Oliphant
*Students' Companion	Best
Success in Spelling	Quance, Madden, Carlson
Trinidad and Tobago Readers	Collins
West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Words at Work	Thomas
Word Perfect	Ridout
Fifth Standard	
A first English Grammar and Analysis	Davidson & Alcock
Caribbean Essential Spelling	Schonell & Hopkins
Comprehension English Grammar	Holmes
Comprehensive Grammar I	Holmes
Easy Steps in Spelling	—
English Grammar for Beginners	Tipping
*English for Middle Primary Schools	Wong
English for Primary Schools	Cleland
*English for Upper Primary Schools	Wong
English Grammar for Elementary Schools	
*English Manuals	Chambers
English Progress Papers	
English Workbook	Richards
English Workbook	Ridout
Essentials of English	Cuthbertson & Watson
Federal Readers	Collins
Further English Progress Papers	—
Groundwork of Grammar	Glassey
Intermediate English Grammar	Alcock & Alcock
Junior English Revised	Richards
Junior Vocabulary	Crew
Junior Vocabulary Exercises	Ridout

TITLE	AUTHOR OR EDITOR
Fifth Standard Contd.	
Lessons in Grammar and Language	Houseman
*Modern English	Russell
More Planned Composition	Hoare
More Words at Work	Mosby & Thomas
New First Aid in English	Maciver
One Hundred Exercises in English Usage and Composition	Dalzell
One Thousand Vocabulary Exercises	Richards
Outline of English Grammar	Nesfield
Preparatory Revision English	-
Reading for Meaning	Carr
Royal Readers	-
Seek and Find English	Crew
Selection Examination English Texts	Richards
Short Course in English Grammar	Oliphant
Step by Step	Bissenden
*Students' Companion	Best
Success in Spelling	Quance, Madden & Carlson
Trinidad and Tobago Readers	Collins
Verbal Ability	Pierre
*West Indian Readers	Cutteridge
Words at Work	Mosby
Word Perfect	Ridout

APPENDIX 2

FORM FOR ASSESSMENT OF TEXTBOOKS

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

ST. AUGUSTINE TRINIDAD

P R O J E C T 15

Assessment of textbooks for Primary Schools

PUBLICATION: _____

AUTHOR(S): _____

PUBLISHER: _____

DATE OF PUBLICATION _____

NO. OF EDITIONS AND IMPRESSIONS _____

CLASSIFICATION _____

AGE LEVEL FOR WHICH INTENDED _____

COUNTRY FOR WHICH PUBLISHED _____

PRICE:

BINDING:

(a) Paperback
(b) Cardboard
(c) Cloth
(d) Cloth and Cardboard
(e) Hardcover

(a) Stitched
(b) Stapled
(c) Glued

FOLK TYPE STORIES:

(b) FICTION (Informational)

(i) THEME _____

(ii) TREATMENT _____

(c) NON-FICTION

(i) THEME _____

(ii) TREATMENT _____

(d) SYNOPSIS OF SUBJECT MATTER _____

(e) STRUCTURES EMPLOYED _____

COMMENTS:

STRUCTURES AND OTHER LINGUISTIC FEATURES _____

_____

VOCABULARY _____

CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
(Textbooks for English Language only)

(a) GRAMMAR
(i) with exercises
(ii) without exercises

(b) COMPREHENSION

(c) EXERCISES
(i) Diagnostic
(ii) Remedial
(iii) Revision

(d) COMPOSITION

(e) VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

(f) ADDITIONAL FEATURES

LAYOUT:

(a) No. of pages_____

(b) No. of chapters, sections, lessons_____

(c) General format of chapters, sections, lessons (if any)

_____

(d) Illustrations:

Photographs Black and white
Drawings Colour

Comments on Illustrations_____

_____

CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (READERS)

(a) Fiction (Imaginative)

(i) Realistic:

Stories or situations about People
Stories or situations about Animals
Stories or situations about Other

(ii) Fantastic:

Folk Tales:

	Familiar	Unfamiliar
Local		
Foreign		
Traditional		

Animal Stories:

	Familiar	Unfamiliar
Local		
Foreign		
Traditional		

DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF -

(a) Teaching (b) Practice (c) Testing Elements
(Textbooks for English Language only)

CULTURAL RELEVANCE _____

_____

LINGUISTIC RELEVANCE _____

ACHIEVEMENT OF AIMS _____

TEACHING METHODS IMPLIED _____

OVERALL JUDGMENT _____